



Abstract

Title : Processes of institutional change: the case of small town water supply systems in Ghana

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Water sector reform programmes in Ghana, including the National Community Water and Sanitation Programme (NCWSP), have sought to achieve accelerated and equitable delivery of improved water facilities to small towns and rural communities, while at the same time ensuring sustainable facility management. This achievement was to be delivered within the framework of the Government of Ghana's decentralisation agenda. However, implementation of these reforms has not led to the desired outcomes and targets. Implementation has faltered in part because the reforms have conflicted with practices within the communities implementing these programmes. Indeed, the policymakers designing the institutional arrangements under the NCWSP hardly took these local contexts into account.

The literature identifies different sets of factors by which to understand the underlying mechanisms and processes that account for institutional change. Three of these are bricolage, translation and institutional entrepreneurship. In short, to resolve conflicts that arise from the incompatibility of externally given water policies with local practices, institutional entrepreneurs use translation and bricolage to reconcile the given policies with existing practices.

The current study adopts Mollinga and Gondhalekar's (2014) stepwise small-*N*/medium-*N* qualitative comparative analysis approach to water research to specify the structures and mechanisms that explain institutional change. Application of this methodology helps us to understand what factors account for differences between given policies and actual practices in implementation, both across and within a variety of study cases. Through an in-depth exploration of six case studies in three regions of Ghana, this research investigates processes of institutional change and local perceptions of the quality of water services and the sustainability of small town water supply systems. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are used, including original survey research ($n=673$), focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews, participant observation and oral histories.

Specifically, this study (i) examines contextual factors which constrain or enable institutional change; (ii) explains how institutional changes manifest in actual practices and what resources actors employ to frustrate or promote institutional change; (iii) analyses the motivating factors and logic behind actors' capacity to emerge as institutional entrepreneurs and change institutional arrangements; and (iv) explores ways in which the concepts of bricolage, translation and institutional entrepreneurship contribute to our understanding of institutional change.

Findings from the case studies demonstrate that institutional entrepreneurs, through processes of bricolage and translation, recombine and modify existing institutional principles and practices. With these recombined institutions and practices, change agents are able to address some of the challenges that emerge in the process of transferring centrally designed water policies to participating communities.

The research finds that the local social and institutional context constrains actors' understanding, interpretation and implementation of institutional change in the water sector. Yet, the constraining factors also enable institutional entrepreneurs to find solutions to pressures exerted by exogenous factors such as technological developments, economic conditions, shifts in state policies and power struggles. This has led to variation in how the NCWSP has been implemented across different communities in Ghana.